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12 December 2007

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BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES LETTER REPORT

Project Name: Boyer Tentative Parcel Map

Case Number: TPM 20794, ER# 03-08-063
Account Number: WN 7493

Dear Mr. Paxton,

I have prepared the following letter report at your request and in response to the scoping letters from County staff dated January 30, 2004, July 6, 2004, and May 2, 2005, and recent communications with County staff.

The Boyer project (see figures in text and accompanying map) encompasses 3.0 gross acres in Mountain Meadows, and is proposed for a minor subdivision into three residential lots of 0.79. 0.82, and 0.98 acres net. The Assessor's Parcel Number for the site is 186-290-33.

THE PROJECT SETTING

The project site is located on the west corner of Mountain Meadow Road and Hidden Meadow Road in the community of Mountain Meadow, north of Escondido in the County of San Diego (Figures 1 and 2). The approximate USGS coordinates of the site are 33°13'N, 117°06'W as determined on-site by Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver (Valley Center 7.5 minute series quadrangle, see Figure 3). The property is bordered on the north and east by the recently widened and re-aligned Mountain Meadow Road, and on the south and west by the former route of Mountain Meadow Road. The general vicinity is characterized by agriculture, high and medium density residential development, golf courses, oak woodlands Scrub Oak Chaparral, and Southern Mixed Chaparral (see Figure 4 and the accompanying Vegetation Map).

The project site consists mostly of an abandoned avocado orchard that has reverted to Non-Native Grassland. The project site was part of a much larger orchard that was trisected in the late 1990s when Mountain Meadow Road was widened and realigned by the County Department of Public Works (Figures 5 and 6). Agriculture was abandoned after the road improvement rendered continuation of grove operations impractical.

METHODS

To conduct an assessment of biological resources, I visited the project site on 9 March 2004. The conditions for observation during the visit were excellent, with clear skies, no impediments to visibility, temperatures in the high-80s, and no wind. The visit lasted from approximately 1145 to 1445. During my visit, I was able to examine the entire project site and adjacent areas. My observations on-site were recorded as they were made, and form the basis of this report and the site Vegetation Map. Animals were identified using scat, tracks, burrows, vocalizations, or direct observation with the aid of 10X42 Leica binoculars. Vegetation mapping was conducted in accordance with vegetation community definitions as described in Holland (1986) and Oberbauer (1996). In addition, vegetation mapping on-site was aided by the use of a digital aerial photograph. On-site distance measurements were aided by the use of a Rolatape® Model 300 Distance Measuring Wheel. Measurements taken from the base map provided by the project engineer were taken with a LaSico® Model L-10 Compensating Polar Planimeter or Scale Master Classic® Digital Plan Measure. It should be noted that all vegetation community mapping is verified on the ground to the greatest degree possible in the absence of a systematic land survey. All vegetation areas, boundaries, and fuel modification zone limits are estimates subject to final delineation by a professional land surveyor.

RESULTS[1]

Based on soil conservation service maps (Bowman 1973), the soil type for the project site is Cieneba rocky coarse sandy loam, with 9-30% slopes, eroded (CmE2). Although a detailed soil analysis is beyond the scope of this report, on-site examination appeared to verify this principal soil type. Several large boulder outcrops are found along the southern site boundary.

Habitats on the Project Site

Non-Native Grassland

As noted above, the project site was formerly part of a larger, producing avocado orchard that was disrupted by the County's realignment and widening of Mountain Meadow Road in the late 90s. The road realignment resulted in the creation of several new, smaller parcels. The project site occupies one of these parcels. Agriculture was abandoned as a result of the road work. As a result, the dead and dying trees are now situated within dense, invasive weedy annual grasses such as *Avena*, *Bromus*, and others. This habitat type accounts for 1.78 acres on the site (Photograph 1).

Scrub Oak Chaparral

Located within the southwest corner of the project site is a small area (0.18 acres – See Figure 7) that contains Scrub Oak Chaparral and very large boulder outcrops. Within this area the former operator of the orchards did not clear native vegetation, and dense, high Scrub Oak Chaparral remained. Plant species in this area include laurel sumac *Malosma laurina*, scrub oak

[1] Scientific and common names for plant species are derived from The Jepson Manual, 1993; scientific and common names for birds from the A.O.U. Check-list of North American Birds, 1998.

Quercus berberidifolia, coast live oak *Q. agrifolia* var. *agrifolia*, wild cucumber *Marah macrocarpus*, poison oak *Toxicodendron diversilobum*, and others (Photograph 2).

Urban / Developed

A significant portion of the site (0.88 acres) extends half way into the new alignment of Mountain Meadow Road and includes a former driveway on the site (See Vegetation Map). This area also includes Native Landscape along the cut and fill slopes resulting from the new road alignment.

Disturbed

Small areas of unvegetated soil (0.15 acres) are found in the southeast corner of the site. These areas were apparently not "landscaped" after the new roadway alignment was created.

Southern Willow Scrub

As a direct result of the road realignment, a culvert was placed under the new road to allow runoff from the area east of the road to pass underneath Mountain Meadow Road. As a direct consequence of this action by the County, a very small patch of wetland vegetation (0.01 acres) has established at the mouth of the culvert (Photograph 3). Wetland plant species in the area are primarily several moderate-sized willow (*Salix* sp.) shrubs. As shown in Figure 5, this area was clearly part of the agricultural operation before the realignment, and no habitat of this type was previously present.

Plant and Animal Species on the Project Site

During the site surveys a variety of common resident bird species were observed. These included Anna's Hummingbird *Calypte anna*, Bushtit *Psaltriparus minimus*, Common Raven *Corvus corax*, Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus*, Western Scrub Jay *Aphelocoma californica*, California Towhee (*Pipilo crissalis*), and House Finch *Carpodacus mexicanus*). These species are typical residents of urban and chaparral habitats.

California Ground Squirrels *Spermophilus beecheyi* are common on the site. Western Fence Lizards *Sceloporus occidentalis* were observed on the site. Other common mammal, reptile, and amphibian species likely occur in the habitats on-site.

No sensitive plant or animal species were observed on the project site, or are considered likely to occur.

PROJECT IMPACTS

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires that projects avoid or adequately mitigate for the loss of sensitive species and habitats. Such avoidance or mitigation enables County staff to make a finding that all project impacts are below a level of significant and to issue a Negative Declaration for the proposed project. As indicated in the table below, the project will impact 1.98 acres of several habitat types.

Table 1. Existing and Impacted Vegetation Communities on the Project Site

PLANT COMMUNITY	ACREAGE ON-SITE	IMPACTED ACREAGE	MITIGATION REQUIRED (Ratio)
Non-Native Grassland	1.78	1.78	0.89 (0.5:1)
Disturbed	0.15	N/A	N/A
Southern Willow Scrub	0.01	0.01	0
Scrub Oak Chaparral	0.18	0.18	0.18 (1:1)
Urban/Developed	0.88	N/A	N/A
Total	3.0	1.98	1.07

However, before mitigation is required, it must be determined that impacts are "significant". California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines define "significant effect on the environment" as a "substantial, or potentially substantial adverse change in the environment." The CEQA Guidelines further indicate that there may be a significant effect on biological resources if the project will:

A. Substantially affect an endangered, rare or threatened species of animal or plant or the habitat of the species.

B. Interfere substantially with the movement of any resident or migratory fish or wildlife species to the extent that it adversely affects the population dynamics of the species.

C. Substantially diminish habitat for fish, wildlife, or plants.

With regard to the wetland on-site, it is artificial and miniscule in size, and is not connected with any similar habitat in the vicinity. Wetland impacts are regulated under the County's Resource Protection Ordinance (RPO). Although this feature on-site may technically meet the RPO wetland definition, it provides minimal to no biological value due to its artificial creation, small size, minimal vegetation, and required ongoing maintenance as a stormwater management structure. The intent of the RPO is to "increase the preservation and protection of the County's unique topography, natural beauty, diversity, and natural resources and a high quality of life for current and future residents of the County of San Diego." This artificially created habitat is not environmentally sensitive land or habitat, and protection of the feature would not be in accordance with the intent of the RPO.

The loss of 0.18 acres of Scrub Oak Chaparral and 1.78 acres of Non-Native Grassland is considered significant, and will require mitigation to reduce impacts to a level below significant.

According to the project engineer, no off-site impacts will result from the implementation of this project.

CONCLUSIONS

Impacts to 0.18 acres of Scrub Oak Chaparral and 1.78 acres of Non-Native Grassland is considered significant and will require mitigation to reduce impacts to a level below significant. Mitigation will be accomplished by the purchase off-site of suitable habitat credits within a County approved mitigation bank in the region. The County requires impacts to Scrub Oak Chaparral to be mitigated at a 1:1 ratio and impacts to Non-Native Grassland at a 0.5:1 ratio. At these ratios, 1.07 acres of appropriate habitat will be conserved within a County approved mitigation bank. A determination of where mitigation will occur will be made prior to final project approval.

In order to prevent any adverse impacts to off-site resources, it is recommended that adequate measures (Best Management Practices) be taken during construction to prevent runoff from entering the adjacent undisturbed habitats. These measures should be sufficient to help reduce any possible indirect impacts of the proposed project to a level below significant.

The mitigation measures as proposed will reduce all actual and potential project impacts to a level below significant.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to conduct this work and prepare this report. Please contact me if I can provide any additional information or provide clarification.

Sincerely,

William T. Everett
Biological Consultant

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